

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

The Marvin and Virginia Schmid Law Library

Law, College of

9-2013

The Tools of Our Trade

Richard Leiter

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/lawlibrary>



Part of the [Law Librarianship Commons](#), [Legal Profession Commons](#), and the [Legal Studies Commons](#)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Law, College of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Marvin and Virginia Schmid Law Library by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

The Tools of Our Trade

The modern world requires that librarians be among the first to exploit digital tools

By Richard Leiter

During the past 30 years, computers and other digital tools have evolved from scientific curiosities that promised to make our lives easy and paperless and threatened to make libraries go away to ubiquitous means of communication, research, entertainment, news, and much, much more. Access to technology for librarians today is as critical as having access to leather-bound books once was for the earliest librarians. In order to communicate with peers, patrons, and colleagues and to conduct legal research and create scholarship, today we need a device that lets us “see” the communication or information.

This article explores the changing role of technology in libraries during the past three decades and argues that digital technology, including computing, at one time a “special interest” and avocation of professionals and the hobbyists among us, is no longer either; rather, it has become an integral part of our profession.

Furthermore, as we maintain our expertise in the more traditionally required skills—in the use, maintenance, and preservation of books, fiche, and other print material—we must simultaneously develop the same level of expertise in these new digital tools. We then must capture the advantages offered by the tools and translate those advantages for the benefit of our patrons if we are to serve them effectively.

Survey of Library Tools

What are the tools of our trade? As librarians, this question may sound absurd. At its root, this question raises the fundamental question: What is a library? It is beyond the scope of this article to attempt to fully answer this question; instead, I want to focus on the narrower question of, "What are the tools of librarians?"

When you think of the tools of the trade for a carpenter, banker, or restaurateur, the images are fairly clear: a carpenter has a level, hammer, and saw; a banker has a safe, calculators, and counters for tellers to operate; and a restaurateur has a kitchen, storage facilities, and tables and tablecloths. But what are the tools of librarians?

Historically, the tools of our trade were extremely simple. All one needed to practice the art of librarianship was light;



gravity took care of the rest. In terms of using books, or scrolls for that matter, it was easy.

Beyond light and a safe place away from the elements that might erode materials, libraries needed little else to safeguard and facilitate the use of the collection other than signage and materials to create bibliographies and cataloging records.

One critical tool that we take for granted is eyeglasses. You can have all the light, shelving, and fiche readers in the world, but if your eyesight is such that you can't read the materials, you can't practicably be a librarian. Nearly everyone over 40 becomes resigned to the fact that anything within arm's length might as well be written in a foreign language, even if only a few months before you could read the fine print on, well, anything. I would argue that we've reached a point where computing devices have become as necessary as eyeglasses: they're absolutely needed to view most of the data we use every day.

Over time, of course, libraries have seen interesting and radical developments

in publishing that have affected the nature of our collections and our libraries. Some of these developments are nearly laughable: micro-cards, as one example, were a remarkable attempt to blend an emerging technology (photography) with an old one (printing) with decidedly mixed results. Ultra-fiche was another attempt at maximizing an emerging technology with odd results: a few readers will remember West's remarkable campaign in the mid 1980s of a "library in a box," in which they sold personal ultra-fiche readers that used ambient light and touted the fact that the entire National Reporter System could fit in a plastic box roughly the size of a shoe box.

Aburdities aside, we have seen many formats come and go over time, including video disks (remember IAC's original LegalTrac?), CD-ROMs, and more. Fiche and film readers and reader-printers are now standard equipment in most every law library, and librarians became rather expert in threading microfilm, adjusting proper lenses, and even troubleshooting copiers. In short,

each format meant that the libraries, and hence, the librarians, had to adopt the new tools to perform their jobs.

In addition to adequate light and safe storage for our library materials, we are now dependent on electricity and phone lines. We also got pretty handy with other “standard” library tools, such as large-capacity hole punches and staplers, not to mention the occasional screwdriver.

In the early 1980s, we saw a revolution in legal information formats when Lexis and Westlaw burst upon the scene. At the same time, personal computers and even networked computers became important tools in libraries, legal education, and the practice of law. At the time when computers were making their way into law and legal education, they were treated as novelties and curiosities. AALL's first group of members interested in computers and computing was the Automation and Scientific Development Special Interest Section! Computing was initially considered a “special interest,” not a true feature of law librarianship. Throughout the 1980s, there were predictions that law libraries would disappear altogether as the content of legal bibliography shifted into digital formats. In November 1990, Jerome Rubin, a founder of Lexis, spoke at a meeting of the Association of American Publishers and declared that print was dead. He also intimated to attendees that they were soon to be history and that they should start looking for new jobs. Publishers were shocked, and the shockwaves rocked the library world as well.

Rubin was wrong, as it turned out, but as a founder of Lexis he set a ball rolling. Today computers are very important to our profession in ways that Rubin never predicted. Computers are not replacing print material; their power is much greater than that. Computers are tools that don't replace anything. When pundits like Rubin made their grandiose declarations, do you think they even imagined that computing would, on one hand, provide a means for consuming or researching any audio, visual, or digital content and instantly sharing it with virtually anyone (and nearly everyone) in the world?

At the time, computers were seen as devices that could search, recall, and display letters, words, and graphics . . . and even play some sounds. They were seen as one-dimensional tools that would replace paper. New computing technology is bringing us to the information in unthinkable new ways and with unimaginable power. Even though we had *Star Trek*, Ray Bradbury, and Dick Tracy to provide us with visions of the potential capabilities of new technology, I doubt that many imagined that iPhones would evolve

beyond phone conversations and be capable of searching, navigating, and sending video communication and text messages. Mobile devices have become more than simply a means of communication as more publishers/developers develop and package their own information resources whose use is becoming part of the resource itself.

New Tools?

As computing power grows, the line between personal and professional computing blurs and can only be determined at the extremes of their use. The next time you observe a lawyer, judge, professor, or student using his or her phone or tablet, pause and wonder for a moment what that person is using the device to *do*. It's as likely that they are checking Facebook, email, the weather, or making reservations for dinner or a trip as it is that they are using Lexis, Westlaw, Bloomberg, or Fastcase!

Laptops, tablets, and phones can now be used for nearly anything from collecting, sharing, and editing photos to collecting, sharing, and editing legal bibliography. They are also used to teach, file documents, conduct research, and create scholarship and blogs. Even though they are *not* the preferred format for *all* of legal research, they are excellent for much of it, such as the extraordinary process of Shepardizing a notorious 50-year-old federal case.

Ranganathan wisely observed that libraries serve to bring people and books together (understood here in the sense of books being vehicles or methods for communicating and preserving information). “Books are for use. Every reader his book. Every book its reader. Save the time of the reader.” In the first four laws of library science, Ranganathan defined modern libraries. Computing as it is evolving and developing is facilitating the access to and use of legal information.

New Tools, Old Functions

Libraries use computing technology to tell patrons about new acquisitions and developments and to provide links to online resources that they sanction, support, develop, or license. Librarians also use it extensively in communicating with patrons. Libraries communicate through more formal channels, such as newsletters, blogs, and reference question answers via chat, as well as by using various social media sites and tools to publicize their writings and research, as well as those of their institutions or patrons. Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, and other social media services are standard communication tools that libraries use daily to connect with patrons.

What's more, the growth of technology as personal technology has put sophisticated technology in *everyone's*

hands—even people who were once proud to identify themselves as luddites. This excuse is no longer sustainable in light of the demands of professional and social organizations and associations, much less children, grandchildren, and friends. When the technologies merged and email, web browsing, and media consumption suddenly were all available on the same devices, the lines between personal devices and professional ones became blurred. People are using their devices for 24/7 communications of all kinds, both personal and professional.

It is nearly impossible these days to find a computer that is only used for professional purposes. In our ordinary daily lives, many of us use the same tools to communicate with our families and friends as we use to find articles on Hein Online or monitor developments at the Supreme Court or the dockets of cases of interest. It is as though computers and digital devices have ceased to be mere special interests but are now the true tools of our profession. From serials check-in to cataloging to searching, retrieving, capturing, and sharing legal documents and information, computers now play such a role in our professional lives that we tend to take them for granted. Seriously, have computers and digital devices become so ubiquitous that the analogy to eyeglasses is true? Is it possible for a librarian today to function without a computer on his or her desk or in hand?

The use of email and familiarity with web pages; search engines; various social networking software such as Twitter; and other tools, such as listservs and RSS readers, are critical for librarians who want to keep abreast of new developments in our field and who want to serve our patrons and administrations. In the analog world, librarians are experts in complex classification systems and cooperative enterprises, such as the LC classification system, OCLC, and interlibrary loan. Librarians must also be experts in the technical aspects of the new digital formats.

New Tools, New Challenges

It goes without saying that libraries should supply their librarians with the tools needed to accomplish their goal of fully serving patrons. How this is best accomplished is an open question. Should libraries provide librarians with a professional development budget that they may spend on acquiring the latest digital devices, or should librarians, like carpenters, be responsible for bringing their own tools to their places of employment? Perhaps these new devices have become so integral to our work that they *are* analogous to eyeglasses. Should librarians be responsible for acquiring and maintaining the technology that we need to perform our work?

(continued on page 41)

All of this raises interesting questions for library directors, firm administrators, and deans. As technology advances and the tools we need to be excellent librarians grow richer, more powerful, and ever more insidiously intertwined with our personal and professional lives and tasks, can there be any excuse *not* to ensure that librarians have the best equipment available? Indeed, librarians must not only have access to, and competence in, the use of all forms of digital devices in order to serve our modern patrons, we must all but *own*

the tools—at least in a figurative sense.

A significant challenge is that iPads and Kindles are *personal* devices, by design. Communicating, searching, and sharing are so well integrated that it's virtually impossible to keep one so objectively professional as to permit multiple users to share the same device and develop a skill level beyond mere competence. When patrons request help accessing library material using any device or platform, librarians should be quick, confident, and expert when offering assistance.

Like eyeglasses, digital devices have become significant, integral tools of our trade. Law librarians should be among the first to exploit the capabilities of new digital tools lest we fail to relate to our modern patrons or provide them with the best service available. ■

Richard Leiter

(rich.leiter@unl.edu) is director at University of Nebraska—Lincoln's Schmid Law Library.



member to member

In this era of 24/7, do you fully disconnect when you are out of the office on vacation or at a conference?

When I go to a conference, I never disconnect because I consider myself to be at work. It is different when I am on vacation. I can partially disconnect from checking my emails once in a while. This summer, I made a big exception by leaving my BlackBerry at home. I went to France for one month with my family and decided not to bring my BlackBerry to avoid the roaming charges. The first week, I felt uncomfortable and kept asking myself if they would be able to manage without me at the office. However, soon after I forgot about work and enjoyed my vacation. As psychoanalysts say, smart phones and devices of this type have become a new appendage for human beings, so we feel strange without them. In addition, such tools make us feel important. I can assure you that when I came back to work there had been no emergencies and no questions that only I could have answered. It's a reminder that none of us is indispensable. Maybe our cell phones and technologies are convincing us otherwise. Perhaps we should take daily breaks from them.

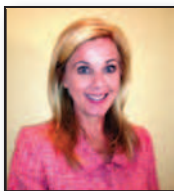
Gisèle Laprise, bibliothécaire/librarian at Blake, Cassels & Graydon LLP in Montréal

Well, I had to stop laughing first . . . sorry, I've still got the giggles . . . OK, OK! I have never gone far enough to not check in on the BlackBerry or dial in to work on contracts and other projects. Fifteen years ago, my BlackBerry reception at the shore was almost nonexistent, and the remote access program for the office was dreadful. A plethora of cell towers and Citrix fixed my inability to connect to work. So the answer is no, I do not really get to disconnect from work while on vacation, and conferences are paid for by my firm, so I must check in. However, there is hope—I've noticed an uptick in the number of attorneys who are vacationing for more than one week and in faraway places. That may be the ticket for law librarians! Anyone interested in visiting "the happiest place on Earth?" Port Vila, the capital and largest city of Vanuatu!

Loretta Orndorff, director of library services at Cozen O'Connor in Philadelphia

When I am at a conference I do check email regularly and will respond if necessary. It keeps me from facing hundreds of emails when I return to the office. I try to make sure I'm just in "delete mode," not spending my conference time trying to work. I may be "at work" when at a conference, but I want my focus to be on learning and networking. Otherwise, why go to the conference? In the old days, I made a point of not checking in with work while on vacation. Now, with the iPhone, it is too easy to stay connected. I miss being completely unplugged! This does beg the question, why don't I unplug on my own and leave the phone behind? Ack! What a scary thought!

Cathy Hardy, library services manager at Hanson Bridgett LLP in San Francisco



Shauna Wiest

I am in daily contact with the office. I believe that since my employer has supported my attendance at a conference, it is no different than an actual work day, and I feel obliged to check in. I tend to be more organized and energized while at a conference, which makes checking email, responding to requests, and even communicating what I have learned at the conference relatively painless tasks. I actually look forward to putting into immediate action any helpful information I have learned and view checking in with the office as an ideal opportunity to do so.

Shauna L. Wiest, law librarian at Stoel Rives LLP in Salt Lake City

I do not disconnect from the office. While at conferences, I am still working. My firm supports my attendance at conferences even when I am travelling for association work. I maintain contact through a firm-provided iPhone. I stay connected to delegate work and to support library staff

who "man the fort."

On vacation, I may disconnect from email, but I am available by phone or text on my firm-provided device.

My colleagues understand the concept of "emergency," and I trust them to use their good judgment about when to interrupt my time away with work issues.



Shaunna Mireau

Director of Knowledge Management and Libraries Shaunna Mireau, Field Law, Edmonton, Alberta



Brenna Louzin

There is a tremendous amount of pressure in our society to be connected. In fact, it seems that to be a true professional, one must show that one is connected, both professionally and personally, just about all of the time. I am

constantly working on achieving a balance of being responsive to my firm and staff as well as to my family and friends. Sometimes, all of these balancing efforts wear me out. At the recent AALL conference here in Seattle, I tuned into my email frequently but not obsessively. Even though the conference was in my home city, I still needed to "check on things" and may have felt more pressure, being so close. During the week, I try to turn off my work-supplied smart phone as soon as I get home from work. And on Fridays I try and turn it off before 6 p.m. and not turn it back on until, oh, Sunday evening . . . but just for a few minutes. I am learning how to recharge.

Brenna Louzin, manager of legal and business research development services at Foster Pepper PLLC in Seattle

I don't really ever disconnect from work emails on vacations or at conferences unless I am out of the country and it is too hard to check email. Fishing in northwest Ontario this summer had me pretty cut off,



Carol Bannen

but if I sat under the camp owner's balcony, I could pick up Wi-Fi and check my email in the evenings on my iPad while batting mosquitos and chasing a chipmunk off my lap. It is so

miserable to go through emails after a full week of vacation that even a little bit per day really helps. I like to think it eliminates stress in my life.

Director of Information Resources Carol Bannen, Reinhart Boerner Van Deuren s.c., Milwaukee

If I'm at a conference, never! I stay completely connected—to work, family, everyone and everything. Conferences are usually work related, so I feel I "need" to be connected while at a conference. Vacation, though—that's a little different. I try hard to disconnect from work but fail miserably. I minimize it to one or two contacts only or "first thing in the morning" contacts.

Valerie Lerma, collection development librarian at Maricopa County Superior Court Law Library in Phoenix



Patrick Lavey

No, I do not fully disconnect while on vacation or at a conference. Being connected makes the vacation or conference more worthwhile. Two recent examples proved this to me. While at the 2013

Annual Meeting in Seattle, I checked email and visited websites to enhance my conference experience and share it with others. Seattle is one of the world's most "connected" cities and I did not want to miss out on it. Three weeks later, I was on vacation in Vinalhaven, Maine, an island in Penobscot Bay. It is easy to disconnect there as the island is relatively remote. However, if I did this, I would deny myself access to *The New York Times*, which usually sells out quickly at The Paper Store (yes, they really call it The Paper Store). I would also miss chances to catch up with

friends via email and Facebook. *The New York Times* Magazine's The Meh List called Wi-Fi hot spots "meh" (not hot, not not, just meh). The writers clearly have never been to Vinalhaven, where Wi-Fi is a blessing and most cell phones are unusable. Be it a conference or on vacation, being connected is both essential and part of the fun.

Patrick Lavey, catalog librarian at Yale Law School's Lillian Goldman Law Library in New Haven, Connecticut



Eugenia Newton

You are a glutton for punishment if you disconnect completely. I mean who has time . . . right? When or if I find time to take a vacation, I stay connected. One way of doing this is by taking my iPad with

me and going through my email once a day (it takes me only one hour a day). I would rather go through my emails each day and be in tune with what is going on at work versus coming back to the office, wasting days trying to catch up, and spending hours upon hours answering emails. I think of the email I receive as falling into three categories: informational, quick response, and lengthy explanations. If you think about it, a majority of emails law librarians receive on a daily basis are informational and do not require a response. These emails take only a few minutes to glance over and help me stay abreast of new developments going on in the office. Emails that require quick responses can be done immediately, and everyone knows you're on vacation, so your bulletpoint responses are often accepted. For emails that require lengthy explanations, I flag them as "unread," and when I return to the office, I know which emails I need to respond to immediately. I think my iPad makes it easy to stay connected via email, and with the fast pace of technology making it easy to stay connected, there's no excuse not to stay connected (unless you enjoy devoting days to catching up).

Eugenia Charles-Newton, faculty services librarian at Texas Tech University School of Law Library in Lubbock



Joe Reimers

The short answer for me is, it depends. When I am at a conference, I make a point of trying to remain connected because I am usually "on company time."

In fact, at the Annual Meeting in Seattle, something came up that required my immediate attention, and it was good to be able to react to it in a timely manner. This is not to say I operate with the same degree of instant response I do at work: I communicate with the office via email rather than text messaging, and I check email when I am in a position to respond to email rather than having email disrupt a session. That said, I consider vacation time my own. Depending on what I am doing with my time off, I may or may not remain connected, but I try very hard to have one week per year where I can disconnect completely and truly "get away from it all." As much as I rely on instant and easy communication, I find that making myself inaccessible for a relatively short period of time puts me in a position where I can truly relax and forget about work, which makes me that much more effective when I return. A vacation is not a vacation if you're worried about work, and I've found that whether I'm connected or not, the world continues to turn and things still seem to fall into place—particularly if I've planned my vacation in advance and communicated that I will be completely out of contact for that time.

Joe Reimers, Notre Dame Law School, Notre Dame, Indiana

views from you

Share Your Views with Spectrum

What views of your library are meaningful to you? Whether it's the atmosphere surrounding your reference desk, a striking scene outside your window, a unique event taking place in your library, or a moment captured on your morning commute, this is your chance to share it with AALL.

In order to be publishable, pictures must be of relatively high quality. Digital submissions are preferred and must be high resolution (300 dpi). Submit your photos to AALL Marketing and Communications Manager Ashley St. John at astjohn@aall.org.



This photo of the Fort Worth Water Gardens in Fort Worth, Texas, was taken from the second floor of the Texas A&M University School of Law. The Water Gardens was used to film a famous scene for the 1976 film Logan's Run, starring Michael York and Farrah Fawcett. The story details a post-apocalyptic world where people live in a huge domed city and everybody dies at the age of 30. In the scene, York, or "Logan," jumps off the steps and into the waterfall to get back into the dome. This photo was taken and submitted by Head of Technical and Electronic Services Joan Stringfellow, Dee J. Kelly Law Library.



BUSINESS, UNUSUAL.

Today's modern legal organization has everything it needs to conduct the business of law. Or does it?

A deep understanding of a business or an industry is essential to helping your clients see trends, opportunities and challenges first.

Bloomberg Law[®] powerfully integrates world-class company and market information, proprietary news and comprehensive legal content—all searchable in one place. With the addition of Bloomberg BNA, you gain even more insight from practice-area analysts and leading practitioners. Seize the advantage with a legal and business intelligence, news and research system organized for the way you work.

**BECAUSE IN TODAY'S LEGAL PRACTICE,
IT'S NOT BUSINESS AS USUAL.**

To request a complimentary trial, call us
anytime at 1 888 560 BLAW (2529)
or visit us at about.bloomberglaw.com/aall

**Bloomberg
LAW**



A BROADER VIEW. A CLEARER FOCUS.

The strength of change.

Broadening our reach to more librarians and focusing our resources on your most pressing training and library management needs are two of our top priorities. To achieve them, we are expanding our electronic communications to reach you, no matter where you are located. We also are developing new education programs to help you work more efficiently and adapt to change more confidently and successfully. We encourage you to join us for our new market events and expanded training, and we welcome your comments about them.

store.westlaw.com/librarian



THOMSON REUTERS™